



Southern Africa DOSSIER

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"The Cuito Cuanavale Syndrome": Some Notes on Pretoria's Tactical and Strategic Options after the Angola Debacle

1. Introduction

By September 1988 it had become commonplace to conclude that military realities in southern Angola--more than any other single factor--forced the Pretoria regime to the negotiating table. However, the advent of negotiations and the positive results achieved thus far--e.g. the South African pull-out from Angola and the mutual commitment to implement UN Security Council Resolution 435 on Namibian independence--also give rise to a number of crucial questions. For example: Are the South African military setbacks significant enough to force the Botha regime to change its strategy towards Angola and the issue of Namibian independence? If so, will it be able to acquire the vital consent of the powerful security apparatuses and the extreme right-wing political opposition? How significant is the fact that the linkage between Namibian independence and Cuban withdrawal from Angola, long advocated by South Africa, now seems to be working to the disadvantage of Pretoria? What is the role of US diplomacy in this process and how might the US presidential elections affect the positions of the USA and the regional adversaries?

It must be remembered that South Africa during the last 25 or so years has seen a process of militarisation that is virtually unprecedented in the world. Those with ultimate political and military power in South African society are obsessed with the concept of national security, most often defined by them in the narrow sense of military security. The current regime in Pretoria has adopted the concept of a 'total onslaught', according to which all manifestations against apartheid--be they inside or outside South Africa--result from a Moscow-instigated international communist conspiracy aimed at gaining control over the riches in Southern Africa. As several observers have pointed out, it is irrelevant whether that belief is sincere or not. The important thing is that the concept provides the white minority with an ideology to explain the simple and unwelcome fact that apartheid is not acceptable to the majority of the population in South Africa. Thus, the regime can also justify the militarisation process as well as domestic oppression and regional aggression.

The 'total strategy' adopted to counter this onslaught thus aims at keeping the liberation struggle as far away as possible from South Africa. In the past, whenever a given diplomatic process has been perceived as a potential threat to this basic aim, Pretoria has aborted the process, reneged on commitments, or resorted to violence. There is, thus, ample reason to take a sceptical view on the current diplomatic process over the Angola/Namibia imbroglio. On the other hand, it must also be taken into account that the strategic framework within which the current negotiations are taking place is heavily influenced by two new and seemingly powerful factors: first, there has been a marked change in the balance of military power and, second, the United States and the Soviet Union have so far, and for the first time, managed to exert a fairly strong joint pressure for a negotiated solution. A possible third factor--though not so easy to quantify--could be that significant changes have occurred in the domestic balance of forces within the white minority in South Africa.

The aim of the present paper is fourfold: a) to briefly summarize the key events in the war in Angola; b) to identify the military weaknesses of the South African military machine and comment on what South Africa could do, or is doing, in order to rectify these weaknesses; c) to describe some key elements in the wider strategic context and d) arrive at some preliminary conclusions by delineating the Pretoria regime's tactical and strategic options with respect to peace with Angola and Namibian independence.

2. Key events in the war

The following does not offer a complete description of the war in southern Angola, the tactics employed, the material gains and losses, the numbers of dead and wounded, etc. It merely centres on the basic military realities which had, by May 1988, brought the Pretoria regime to the negotiating table.

Though it had troops in southern Angola in preceding months, heavy SADF involvement began in August/September 1987 in response to the concerted effort by Angolan forces to take the town of Mavinga in Cuando Cubango province. With Mavinga as a rear base, it was then planned to attack the UNITA headquarters in Jamba further to the south-east.

South African units, consisting of elements from the ethnically composed 32 and 101 battalions as well as regular white troops from the Permanent Force and units from the South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF), rushed to assist UNITA. The Angolan advance was halted and the SADF launched a massive counter-attack which forced the Angolan troops to withdraw. At Cuito Cuanavale the SADF/UNITA counter-attack was stopped and a military deadlock developed. Angolan troops dug themselves in, established firm

defence lines and received increasing Cuban support, in particular air support. Already by January 1988, South Africa began to lose air superiority. An SADF analysis made in January showed that it was possible to take Cuito, but that this would entail the loss of up to 300 white troops, along with some 2 000 SWATF and an unspecified but large number of UNITA troops.[1] Such substantial losses were evidently deemed unavoidable by the SADF strategists, since the massive land assault required to take Cuito Cuanavale would not be able to enjoy much air cover from the SAAF as a result of the introduction of advanced anti-aircraft missiles, radars and MiG-23/Su-22 fighters for the defence of the town.

The plan to take Cuito through an infantry assault was thus shelved and Pretoria instead opted for a drawn-out artillery battle. The SADF began to shell Cuito with G-5 and G-6 howitzers, Valkiri multiple rocket launchers and, when they could get within range, Oliphant tanks.[2] But the Cuito defences held and the military deadlock around the town increasingly turned into a strategic disadvantage for the regime in Pretoria. Joint US-Soviet pressure for a negotiated solution was being exerted and, while a swift and successful surgical strike on Cuito would have improved South Africa's position in any future negotiations, the actual saturation-type trench war could only serve to weaken such a position.

In a move to regain the initiative, UNITA forces, supported by SADF elements, launched an attack in March 1988 on the north of Cuando Cubango and the Bie and Moxico provinces. The tactical aim of this attack was to take the town of Cuemba, Bie Province on the Benguela railway with its vital airstrip and then move east to take Luena, the capital of Moxico province. It has been convincingly argued that the underlying strategic goal was to establish a bridgehead for the proclamation of an alternative UNITA government in the south-east corner of Angola.[3] Undoubtedly, Pretoria's negotiating position would have been strengthened, had this operation been successful. What remains unclear, however, is what role, if any, the USA played in this context and to what extent US and South African interests converge on the UNITA issue.[4]

After some initial successes, including the capture of UNITA leader Savimbi's birthplace Munhango, the attacks on Cuemba and Luena were repelled by FAPLA and Cuban forces and the UNITA/SADF troops were forced to return south towards Mavinga. It was reported that some SADF troops were cut off during the retreat and became trapped somewhere between Luena and Mavinga, though this claim has not been substantiated.[5] At about the same time Cuban forces, joined by FAPLA and SWAPO troops, fanned out towards the south from the defensive line they had occupied for years along the 16th parallel in the south of Huila Province. This move was supported by reinforcements from the sea (at Namibe), and by troops from the Benguela defensive line further north.

The rapid changes in the deployment of Cuban troops and equipment in the south came as a surprise to the SADF. For example, SADF forces were unable to repel a Cuban air attack in late June on SADF positions near the Calueque dam inside Angola but close to the Namibian border. Also, the SADF troops around Cuito Cuanavale risked becoming entrapped and cut off from their exit route southwards along the Cuito river. At this point, it was apparent that the tactical and strategic situation had deteriorated considerably from the standpoint of Pretoria.

First, two important South African tactical objectives, which had crystallized during the course of fighting, were not achieved. Cuito Cuanavale did not fall and neither did the South African and UNITA forces manage to take the towns of Cumbra and Luena further to the north.

Second, in some important respects, South Africa's overall strategic position was markedly worse than it had been prior to the initiation of large-scale fighting in late summer 1987. Most importantly, South Africa had lost the unchallenged air superiority it previously enjoyed in the region. This obviously had major implications for the situation on the ground. Earlier, South Africa and its UNITA proxies had relative control over the area, and could move about with near impunity in large parts of southern Angola. This was vital, since the area functioned as a buffer zone, separating the SWAPO camps and bases further to the north from the Namibian border. It also served as the main staging area for UNITA's destabilisation war against the Angolan government.

Due to the combined and interlinked effects of the loss of air superiority, the enhanced warfighting capabilities of FAPLA and the introduction of more modern equipment and a distinctly more offensive behaviour on the part of the Cuban forces, the South African control zone shrunk considerably. By early July it consisted only of a small sector in the south-east, delineated by Mavinga, the Cuito and Lomba rivers and the Caprivi strip.

The SADF image of invincibility was thus shattered. Furthermore, Pretoria's puppet force UNITA was left out on a limb. In the process, the SADF lost a considerable number of white troops. These are obviously easy enough to substitute, but the domestic political cost is enormous. A number of vital major weapon systems, such as jet fighters, were also lost. These are almost impossible to replace, and can only be done at high cost. Such were the military realities leading up to the negotiations.

3. Military vulnerabilities

'Window of vulnerability' is a popular catch-phrase in contemporary strategic studies. Much effort goes into identifying windows of vulnerability. The idea, of course, is to close your own and exploit those of the opponent. After its abortive

"Operation Savannah" invasion of Angola immediately prior to the declaration of independence in 1975, the SADF identified a number of critical vulnerabilities in its force structure. This led to several major projects, such as the G-5 and G-6 howitzers, the Oliphant tank, the Ratel armoured fighting vehicle and the Valkiri multiple rocket launcher. All these weapon systems were fielded and used in southern Angola during 1987-88. But, again, new windows of vulnerability opened up. This section will attempt to identify these weaknesses, evaluate their importance and speculate about the possibilities available to South Africa to alleviate them. In other words, will South Africa be able to close its windows of vulnerability before its adversaries can make full use of the opportunity to exploit them?

First, however, it is necessary to examine the erroneous and misleading view, that the SADF has suffered decisive and irreversible defeats on the military battlefield and is now, broken and humiliated, sneaking out the backdoor to lick its wounds while the politicians are left with the gruesome task of negotiating the terms of surrender with the victorious Angolan and Cuban representatives.

This is not true. The SADF has not suffered a decisive defeat. Neither has it all of a sudden become militarily weak in an overall sense. The triumphalism implied in the above viewpoints only serves to obscure the real significance, as well as the limitations of the military setbacks suffered by the SADF. Objectively speaking, it can be argued that the SADF was fairly successful in southern Angola under the circumstances. After all, the SADF never had more than a maximum of 9 000 troops inside Angola, most sources claim the number was around 3 000. This is only a fraction of what the SADF could theoretically field, yet by all accounts they performed extremely well against the numerically superior FAPLA and Cuban troops.

The word 'debacle' appears in the title of this paper for other reasons. For the first time since its participation in World War II, the SADF was confronted with a proper, full-size, battle-hardened conventional force. The SADF did not manage to defeat this force despite making full use of the qualitatively most sophisticated weapons and equipment at its disposal. The swift surgical strike failed and was transformed into into a classical conventional war with large-scale battles, fronts, logistical routes, and so on. This is the important point and this is where the justification for the word 'debacle' lies: the conventional war highlighted serious and specific windows of vulnerability in the SADF military machine--weaknesses that otherwise would not have been so readily apparent.

Two separate sets of vulnerabilities can be distinguished. The first concerns what can be broadly termed human and personnel factors. Most important here is the high loss sensitivity with respect to white troops. By its own account, the SADF lost more than 50 white soldiers in Angola--substantially more according to Luanda. It seems clear that the idea of an infantry assault on

Cuito Cuanavale was rejected by the politicians in Pretoria, mainly since it entailed the risk of losing up to 300 whites. The fact that this level of casualties was deemed unacceptable is an important indicator of just how sensitive South Africa is to white losses. Obviously, under other circumstances this level could change, upwards or downwards.

It is hard to see in what way this particular window of vulnerability could be closed. One way in which it might be done would be to create a more broadly based popular support for the war effort among the white minority. But that would entail, among other things, increasing openness about the military realities such as they are. However, the South African public is still being told that the SADF has scored a stunning victory in Angola and is now--mission accomplished--pulling out. This is a result of the restrictions imposed on the press and other media.

But the real nature of the war cannot be concealed. As young conscripts return from the front in plastic bags and as information from the international press sifts through, public opinion becomes more critical of the war. In early August 143 white conscripts publicly refused to accept an SADF call-up order.[6] Also in August a public opinion poll conducted by the South African Institute for International Affairs (SAIIA) showed that 57 per cent of white South African adults believed that the Botha government should negotiate directly with SWAPO on Namibia. Even among low-income white households--the main political support base of the Conservative Party--support for such negotiations exceeded 50 per cent. Moreover, three out of four white adults oppose increased military spending.[7] Obviously, a wide range of factors influence the results of such public opinion polls, but experiences from other wars, e.g. in Viet Nam and Afghanistan, show that public opinion--and, thus, also political decision makers--are heavily influenced by negative casualty figures.

In order to avoid major white losses in future large-scale war fighting, South Africa could either attempt to recruit foreign mercenaries on a much larger scale than is currently the case or integrate more blacks into the SADF. The first alternative is very costly and anyhow unlikely to produce a sufficient number of recruits. The second alternative has already proven to be, if not counter-productive, at least potentially problematical. The series of mutiny-like protests among black soldiers in Namibia during in late 1987 illustrates the problem of giving blacks the task of defending the apartheid system.[8] So, in sum, the sensitivity to white casualties is a major window of vulnerability and, furthermore, one that will prove difficult to close both in the short and in the longer term.

The other set of vulnerabilities has to do with weapons and equipment. It is mainly related to the above-mentioned loss of air superiority. There are a number of integrated aspects, which add up to this loss of air superiority. First, there is the issue of fighter aircraft. South Africa possesses a fixed number of

relatively modern or modernized Mirage fighters. Due to the mandatory UN arms embargo in force since 1977, South Africa cannot openly acquire new fighters from abroad, neither has it mastered the technology to manufacture the Mirage-3, the Mirage F-1 or any other modern fighter aircraft. The South African Air Force (SAAF) is thus extremely loss sensitive when it comes to its most sophisticated jet fighters. Second, South Africa lacks another essential component in modern warfare, dedicated attack helicopters. Third, SADF air defences are vulnerable. The access to modern anti-aircraft missiles and to associated up-to-date radar systems is limited. Fourth, the SAAF has for years unsuccessfully tried to find a replacement for its obsolete Shackleton surveillance planes. Airborne long-range surveillance is a crucial aspect of modern war fighting. Fifth, South Africa has severely limited access to the most modern C3I (command, control, communications and intelligence) systems. Neither is South Africa up to date in technology related to electronic countermeasures, counter-countermeasures and electronic warfare (ECM,ECCM,EW) so vital for aircraft protection and for airborne attacks on defensive missile sites and other radar- and missile-protected targets, such as armour concentrations, road- or rail junctions, power stations, bridges, and so on.

Most of these factors can be explained in the light of the arms embargo. Despite it many significant loopholes, the embargo has had, and continues to have an effect. The strengths and weaknesses of this embargo, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the SADF and the South African arms industry have been described and analysed in detail elsewhere.[9] The more limited aim here is to identify the key factors explaining why South Africa lost the air superiority.

The weaknesses described above were of course not unknown to the South African strategists and the upper echelons of the military. But the practical implications were not experienced until the Angolans and the Cubans introduced into the front line of battle highly modern equipment of Soviet origin. This equipment is basically identical to the type of equipment supplied to the Syrians by the Soviet Union in the early 1980s. It is the same equipment that was literally wiped out by the Israeli air force in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley in the 1982 Lebanon War. The Israelis achieved this through a combination of maximum use of superior high-technology electronic equipment and advanced weapon systems launched from modern weapon platforms. Six years later, largely as a result of the arms embargo, the SADF failed to copy the Israeli victory in the Bekaa Valley. The South African weaknesses in modern military technology has thus been made clear through hard experience. More importantly, they have also been made clear to South Africa's friends and allies. This is vital, since South Africa will not be able to rectify these weaknesses without the help of these friends and allies. This leads us to the other aim of this section: what can South Africa do, or what is it doing, about these weaknesses? And who is helping?

Turning first to fighter aircraft, the option open to South Africa has been to modernize the ones it already has. In July 1986 the Armscor subsidiary Atlas presented the Cheetah fighter, an upgraded version of the vintage Mirage-3. Compared to the Mirage-3, the Cheetah has a reconstructed airframe, including canards for better stability and manoeuvrability, and new navigation and attack systems, including forward looking sensors and laser rangefinders. According to all outside observers, this work is being carried out by Atlas in cooperation with Israeli Aircraft Industries (IAI). The Cheetah bears a marked resemblance with the Israeli Kfir TC2/TC7, an update of the Kfir-1 which, in turn, is based on Mirage-3/5 blueprints. All remaining Mirage-3s in the SAAF (some 45-55 units) will be upgraded to Cheetah standard, beginning with the two-seater trainers and proceeding to the one-seaters.[10]

Furthermore, it was reported that some 50 technicians and engineers from the cancelled Israeli Lavi fighter project have been given employment in South Africa. They will work, it is claimed, on updating the Mirage F-1 avionics and on the integration of Lavi technology into the SAAF Mirages.[11] Also, it is claimed by foreign military attaches in Tel Aviv that several South African aircraft engineers were attached to the Lavi project throughout much of its duration.[12]

In this context, it is interesting to note that Israel launched a new Mach 2 fighter project, the Nammer (Tiger), at The Singapore Air Show in January 1988. The project reportedly involves the marriage between the sophisticated Lavi avionics package into an updated Mirage-3/5 or Kfir airframe. The Nammer is estimated to cost \$15-20 mn; therefore, there is a need for an overseas customer to launch the project. The rebuild of the airframe indicates a re-modeling similar to that of the Cheetah, whereas the possible inclusion of Lavi avionics would produce an aircraft far more capable than the Cheetah.[13]

South Africa's long-term goal is to proceed with the development of an 'indigenous' fighter aircraft. But this will take time, even with outside assistance, and it will entail numerous technological problems. For example, South Africa cannot at present manufacture jet engines. The Chief of the SAAF, Lieutenant General Jan van Loggerenberg, recently underlined that the SAAF will not be able to enter into service an indigenous fighter before the end of this century.[14]

Second to new or modernized fighter aircraft, the SAAF and the SA Army have an urgent need for attack helicopters for counter-insurgency and ground support missions. The 'indigenous combat helicopter' Alpha XH-1 was unveiled in prototype form in March 1986. Development had been underway since 1981 and French involvement in the project was reported. In 1985 a French source claimed that the company Aerospatiale had sent a team of technicians 'to help Atlas start a combat helicopter project'.[15] This would seem logical, since the entire SADF helicopter fleet--including Alouette-3s, Super Frelons and

Pumas--is entirely French-supplied, with some British Wasp naval helicopters being the only exception. It has also been reported that some laid-off engineers from the Israeli Lavi project will assist in the design and manufacture of an attack helicopter.

The Alpha XH-1 prototype is based on the Alouette-3. It has the same rotors, transmission system and engine as the Alouette, but evidently incorporates some design changes and locally made components. A more powerful transport/attack helicopter, based on the Puma and designated Puma XTP, has also been announced.[16] The involvement of French technicians and technology in these two add-on engineering helicopter projects cannot be corroborated any more than the Israeli involvement in the Cheetah. But factual and circumstantial evidence in both cases strongly indicate that such involvement has taken place.

Another recent and significant Israeli input is the modification of three ex-French Boeing-707s into airborne tankers for the SAAF, thus greatly enhancing the operational radius of the SAAF's Mirages. At least one of these Boeings have also reportedly been converted to a flying command and control centre by equipping it with signals intelligence and ECM/ECCM equipment from the Israeli firm ELTA.[17] This would mean an aircraft similar to the Israeli RC-707 which was so instrumental in the 1982 Lebanon War.

Israeli influence is also notable in the area of drones and remotely piloted vehicles (RPV). The RPV shot down over the Mozambican capital Maputo in May 1983 was an Israeli-built Scout from Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI). The allegedly indigenous Seeker RPV displayed by Armscor at the FIDA International Air Show in Chile in March 1988 bears a marked resemblance to the latest Mastiff RPV from another Israeli company, Tadiran.[18] RPVs are a cheap alternative to more advanced surveillance aircraft. The South African Seeker RPV is equipped with a video camera and a radar dish, both of which continuously send intelligence data back to its controlling mobile ground station. This data can be, for example, locations of fixed enemy positions. The data can then be fed into the artillery computers linked to the G-5 and G-6 howitzers. The Seeker can also carry equipment to jam ground-based radars and communications, thus facilitating air strikes on missile sites, for example. Furthermore, the Seeker has a flight duration capability of nine hours and is difficult to shoot down since it emits too little heat radiation to attract heat-seeking missiles.[19]

Other recent advances in the area of relevance for air superiority is the ongoing purchase of a radar-tracking system for missiles and other high-velocity objects from FR Germany via Britain, and the recent announcement that the development of new anti-aircraft guns and a new surface-to-air missile system has reached the prototype stage.[20]

The obvious conclusion is that South Africa for a number of years has been making a concerted effort to alleviate the weaknesses recently revealed in Angola and, furthermore, that it has

received--and is receiving--substantial external aid in doing so. With the exception of a new jet fighter and an indigenous attack helicopter, all the projects related to air superiority described above can be expected to reach maturity within a five-year period, some much earlier. Taking the insoluble problem of white manpower vulnerability into account, South Africa has no option other than to continue its attempts at circumventing the arms embargo and aim for a marked qualitative edge over its opponents, much like the USA is doing relative to the Soviet Union or Israel relative to the Arab states. South Africa will also aim at maintaining its role as the quantitatively superior military power in the region. This is particularly important in the area of land warfare, where mobility and armour protection of infantry soldiers will continue to receive maximum attention.

4. The wider strategic context: implications for the present negotiations on Namibia

Will South Africa comply with the 14-point accord reached in New York in July 1988 and grant political independence to Namibia or not? A vast number of factors are influencing the process, pulling in different directions. It is useful to try to identify the most important of these factors.

Factors in favour of accord compliance and Namibian independence include, of course, the military realities described in the previous section: the sensitivity to white losses, the military hardware inadequacies, the increasing number of conscript 'refuseniks' and the increasing degree of public support among the white minority for a Namibian settlement.

Then there are economic factors. The wars in Angola and Namibia cost a lot of money for South Africa: figures of Rand 1-2 million per day for the war against SWAPO in Namibia and Rand 10 million per day for the Angolan invasion have been mentioned. Furthermore, South Africa underwrites the Namibian budget deficit and guarantees many of the current short-term loans to Namibia. By contrast, a settlement in Namibia in accordance with SCR 435 would relieve South Africa of direct military spending in Namibia and would, furthermore, bring substantial foreign aid funds to the Namibian government. The Pretoria regime, plagued by a huge and growing budget deficit and the costs of maintaining the apartheid system, could use some of the funds released for socio-economic upgrading programmes in the black townships as a part of its current "winning hearts and minds"-strategy. A settlement might also relieve some of the international pressure for comprehensive economic sanctions against South Africa.

On the political level, there is the recurring hope of breaking out of the international isolation South Africa finds itself in. There is the joint US-Soviet pressure for a settlement. There is also the argument that South Africa will probably never find a President more amenable to South Africa than President Reagan and

that, therefore, it is under the Reagan Administration that South Africa has the best chances of getting the most out of a negotiated settlement. Finally, in terms of domestic policies, the Botha regime may think that a successful negotiated settlement will somehow enhance the legitimacy of its new attempt at 'reforming' apartheid.

Factors against accord compliance and a Namibian settlement are mainly related to military and security considerations--the same considerations that have led South Africa to abort similar processes in the past, most recently in 1981. Furthermore, they raise the important question of who is ultimately in power in South Africa. It may be argued that the chief reason for entering into the peace talks on the part of Pretoria was the need to get its troops out of Angola without further losses being inflicted on them. Having achieved this, it would seem that at least the SADF has no interest in continuing the process. There is an endless armoury of spanners available to throw into the negotiating machinery, should South Africa so wish. They include, for example, the timetable for Cuban withdrawal from Angola and the long list of unclear elements in Resolution 435 itself.[21] It is also very easy to provoke an armed clash, for example near the Namibian border, and use this as an excuse for aborting the process.

In general, a process of militarisation such as the one South Africa has seen in the last 25 years creates its own dynamic. One important point here is the already-mentioned obsession with national security and the aim of keeping the liberation struggle as far away from South African territory as possible. From the point of view of both the regime and the military there is a need to show strength and restore self-confidence after the recent setbacks, not only in Angola, but also in Botswana and Zimbabwe. Against this background it is hard to conceive of South Africa first accepting a withdrawal from Angola and then also consenting to Namibian independence. An additional important fact is that heavy military investments have been made in Namibia, often in installations that are not so easily dismantled.

There are also a number of factors whose impact is unpredictable. One such factor is the internal balance of forces within the ruling white minority. The business community, both English and Afrikaner-based, would probably favour any solution which would further peace and stabilize the regional security situation, thus enhancing the possibility for them to expand their regional economic activities. Foreign Affairs officials, with a comparatively good grasp of the political implications on the global level arising from a continued militaristic regional behaviour, may also be in favour of a negotiated settlement, but would be wary of compromising South Africa's national security. At least parts of the military and security apparatuses would see Namibian independence as a 'sell-out' and a marked deterioration of South Africa's security position.

One question, then, is what position State President Botha will take. He has to balance the two regional objectives of 'apartheid safety' and 'apartheid profitability', while simultaneously weighing the impact of the alternatives at hand on the unstable internal political scene. Another key question is whether it is at all possible in contemporary South Africa to take a major political decision which is not supported by the key military and security representatives in the State Security Council.

Another unpredictable factor is the United States. How does Pretoria weigh the potential gains and losses arising from a settlement on Namibia? Will a Bush or a Dukakis Administration be prepared to scale down economic sanctions if Resolution 435 is implemented? Pretoria may reason that, for example, a Dukakis Administration will be more hostile to South Africa than the Reagan Administration has been helpful, i.e. that Namibian independence in no way will reduce the US pressures—including calls for comprehensive economic sanctions—for an end to the apartheid system. Rather than giving something for nothing, Pretoria might opt out in what would turn out to be the inverse of its behaviour in 1981. Also, what will be the future US position on aid to UNITA? The current positions of the Presidential candidates on the above issues are known, however, they might change after the election. This indicates that the issue of timing is of major importance. It can be assumed that the Pretoria regime will try to postpone the current implementation date of 1 November in order to assess properly the outcome of both the 26 October municipal elections and the US Presidential election.

5. Some observations on Namibian independence and South African internal contradictions

The current situation is somewhat paradoxical. Initially, the South African politicians ordered an invasion of Angola in order to save UNITA and at the same time strengthen South Africa's position in any future talks. The military tried to achieve a quick defeat of the Cuban and Angolan forces, but failed. This led to a situation where the main concern of the military was to get out of Angola. They, however, see no need to yield Namibia. On the contrary, given the events in Angola, the military may argue that it is more important than ever before to maintain Namibia as a protective buffer. The politicians, on the other hand, find themselves caught up in a quagmire of military setbacks and external diplomatic pressures aimed at Namibian independence. One result of this is probably that the level of mutual trust between certain military hardliners and some of the more 'verligte' diplomats and politicians is currently very low. What, then, are the options of Pretoria?

First of all, at the heart of the matter is military security, for Angola and for South Africa. It is not only a question of 'peace with honour' as some will have it. It is the far more

important 'peace with security' that counts. With this basic requirement as the point of departure, Pretoria currently seems to be playing along in the diplomatic process, negotiating with the Angolan and Cuban representatives to identify the maximum diplomatic bargain attainable, while at the same time rushing to improve its military capability and keeping the option open of aborting the process at any given time.

This reflects the existence of two factions within the ruling white elite. When one speaks about such factions within the Nationalist Party, an important difference between such South African 'factionalism' and the type of factions that exist in, for example, a political party in western Europe must be underlined. As opposed to the European case, the existence of factions within the ruling white minority in South Africa does not always imply that certain people take fixed positions on a certain type of issue at all times. The frequent use of terms like 'verligte' and 'verkraapte' or 'hawks' and 'doves' may be misleading sometimes. The common goal for all representatives of the present regime is to remain in power, maintain white minority rule (with or without apartheid) and safeguard South Africa's strategic/economic hegemony in Southern Africa. However, the manoeuvring space for achieving all these aims is constantly shrinking. This often means that circumstances--rather than, for example, ideology or moral conviction--may dictate positions taken. Therefore, while some may be consistently 'verligte' or 'verkraapte', others may vacillate, positioning themselves in the faction that they--at that precise moment and under those particular circumstances--consider best suited to achieve the overall aims.

Bearing this in mind, the current two 'factions' are, first, the one in favour of a Namibian settlement--given certain guarantees--and a restructuring of regional policy towards a more 'benign' South African behaviour. The advantages of economic 'carrots' as opposed to military and economic 'sticks' are underlined by the advocates of this position. They see this as the best way of securing the goal common to both factions: continued white minority rule and regional hegemony. The other faction favours a hard line in both regional and domestic affairs. Its advocates emphasize the rule of force, finding support in the traditional Afrikaner 'laager' mentality and in the notion that 'apartheid safety' is far more important than 'apartheid profitability'. Aspects related to the wider strategic context described above will decide the respective strength of the two 'factions', the resulting balance of forces will lead to one of two possible outcomes: the 'sinking' of the negotiating process or Namibian independence.

There is little to say about the first alternative. If there is no settlement, it is worse than back to square one for Pretoria. The regime will for ever lose what little remains of its international credibility; its isolation will increase and more economic sanctions will be introduced by the international community. Regional aggression will continue and domestic

oppression will increase. This is the 'low road' as outlined by the scenario planners of the Anglo-American Corporation.[22]

The option of Namibian independence is clearly the preferable one. Furthermore, it seems evident that some of State President Botha's ministers favour such a solution, given the present circumstances. This would be particularly true for those whose main concern is the prospects for the South African economy. It is therefore worthwhile to advance some speculations about the guarantees Pretoria will seek in exchange for Namibian independence. Quite substantial guarantees are clearly a prerequisite if there is to be any chance of convincing the militarists to forego the militarist option. Below follows a list of guarantees that perhaps would constitute a maximalist 'best-case' scenario as seen from Pretoria.

- * A non-aggression pact between South Africa and Namibia, modeled on the Nkomati Accord between South Africa and Mozambique.
- * Total banning of the ANC from Namibia.
- * Walvis Bay remains as South African territory.
- * A negotiated settlement and some form of power sharing between the MPLA government and UNITA in Angola.
- * A non-aggression pact with Angola or some similar agreement which clearly defines and makes binding the mutual commitments in the 14-point plan adopted in New York in July.
- * A closure of the ANC bases in Angola.
- * An end to the US disinvestment campaign.
- * An end to US calls for comprehensive economic sanctions against South Africa.
- * A commitment on the part of the US to channel, whenever possible, its regional investments through South Africa.
- * At least a partial lifting of both the embargo on the export of arms and related material to South Africa and the embargo against arms imports from South Africa. In exchange for this, South Africa may offer to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

6. Conclusion

South Africa suffered a number of military setbacks in southern Angola during 1988. This revealed some key military vulnerabilities in the South African military machine. The Pretoria regime will find it difficult to alleviate the

weaknesses related to human and personnel factors. On the other hand, the weaknesses concerning weapons and technology were known already prior to the 1987 invasion. Major efforts to rectify these particular weaknesses have--with considerable outside help--been underway for several years.

With the pull-out from Angola the SADF achieved its principal aim in the negotiating process: not to lose any more white lives. The process continues and the South African negotiators are trying to identify the best possible diplomatic bargain they can achieve. If that bargain is insufficient from the point of view of Pretoria's national security concerns, the negotiating process will be aborted. The final outcome will depend on basic military realities and on the relative importance of the factors in the wider strategic context. However, given the level of militarisation of South African society and the predominance of security concerns in any major political decision, it does not seem that goodwill or astute diplomacy will be decisive. At the heart of the matter is power and, in particular, military power.

The outcome of any negotiation process hinges on two aspects: the relative strength and bargaining position of the parties and the capability to anticipate and pre-empt the moves and proposals of the other party. The above hypothetical Pretoria 'wish list' implies a remoulding of the regional economic setting that would be difficult to accept for the Frontline states and the SADC member states. On the other hand, it is conceivable that certain US and South African interests converge on some of the above points. In fact, there are few contradictions between the South African best-case scenario and the not-yet-abandoned Reagan Administration policy of constructive engagement.

Therefore, and on the assumption that it was military realities that brought Pretoria to the negotiating table in the first place, the logical conclusion is that a strong military and diplomatic pressure on Pretoria must be maintained. South Africa should not be allowed to close its windows of vulnerability. Angola and Cuba currently are in the better bargaining position; they cannot afford to lose this strategic initiative. Here, the arms embargo plays a particularly crucial role. The advent of negotiations prove that sanctions do work. It is currently essential to apply the embargo provisions with utmost rigour and prevent deliveries of all military, nuclear and strategic equipment, including dual purpose goods and inputs to South Africa.

This conveys the fundamental message to the Pretoria regime that the apartheid system is recognized by the international community as the root cause of instability in the region. This would be an important first step on the real 'high road' for South Africa and for Southern Africa. Should the opposite come true, the burden of guilt will rest heavily with those Western powers which furnish South Africa with the military technology needed to maintain apartheid and continue its policy of regional aggression.